



**EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
HONOLULU**

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

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“BIPARTISAN EDUCATION REFORM ACT OF 2004”

April 29, 2004

Aloha to those joining us here at the Capitol and everyone watching on television or listening on radio.

Education reform is the most important issue facing our state, and it has been my highest priority throughout this legislative session.

People across the state have put in countless volunteer hours working with our administration in an attempt to improve the public education system so all our students have the opportunity to reach their potential and follow their dreams.

My administration advocated strongly for a constitutional amendment to let the voters decide if we should place far greater authority, accountability and financial resources at the local level.

Our current system of top-down management by the statewide Department of Education has obviously failed. The superintendent of schools says the department is "obsolete" and failing the next generation of students. Her assessment of the system should set off alarm bells to even the most casual observer of the current school system.

We are the only state to have such a centralized education system and our students consistently rank at or near the bottom of the nation on standardized tests.

Unfortunately, our constitutional amendment to change the system, along with our well-thought-out education reform bill met stiff resistance from the majority party in the House and Senate. Our compromise plan submitted on April 8 that proposed local school boards for the neighbor islands and other basic, common sense reforms was also dismissed.

What the people of Hawai'i are finally left with is the majority party's bill, entitled "Reinventing Education Act of 2004." While not wanting to paint the bill with too broad a brush, it does not reinvent education, it mainly protects the status quo, and in one case it makes matters much worse by increasing bureaucracy and reducing accountability.

On one hand, I wish the legislature had taken more time to consider my education bill. But on the other hand, sending their bill up early has left us time to amend it.

Many people have shared their thoughts with me on Senate Bill 3238 during the past couple of weeks, including cabinet members, legislators, principals, teachers, parents, students and members of the business community. I received many phone calls, letters and e-mails from the public regarding what this bill would do and what it would not do.

After listening to everyone's advice and considering all the pros and cons, it became clear that I could not in good conscience place my stamp of approval on the "Reinventing Education Act of 2004." This bill contains too many flaws in its present form and clearly does not reinvent education.

That leaves me with just two alternatives. I can either let the bill become law without my signature, or I can veto it. To simply let it become law in its current form would be wrong, because it does not even begin to bring about the genuine reform so many fought so hard to achieve, and it raises false expectations for all those who hoped this would be the year that real change would occur.

I have decided, therefore, to exercise what I call a "soft veto." In other words, while I cannot support this exact bill, I will consider a revised version. I am asking the legislature to use these final days of the session to develop new language that would create a bill we can all take pride in and regard as a step forward.

I realize we have to identify a vehicle for this new education bill, and that would be **House Bill 1176**. Moreover, I propose that we rename our joint effort the "**Bipartisan Education Reform Act of 2004.**"

Because we still have one week left in the regular 2004 legislative session, the executive and legislative branches have the opportunity to come together now to craft a bill that will bring about meaningful education reform.

I am asking the legislature to consider making just five changes. They would be simple to make, yet result in significant improvements at our schools. These changes are:

- Give principals control over 70 percent of their operating budgets initially, but phase-in a plan that would allow them eventually to control 90 percent of funds. At first glance it may not appear there is much difference between giving principals 70% versus 90% of the money. But it will mean a world of difference in the classroom. That is because at 70% most of the spending is already predetermined since it goes to salaries and related items over which the principal has little or no control. It is only when principals are given authority for 90% or more of the funds at their schools that they truly gain the financial flexibility they need to make meaningful improvements.
- Empower principals, set standards for their performance and hold them accountable. In business, in education, and in every social organization, leadership makes the difference. Individual

teachers also make a difference. But it is the principals who can inspire, motivate, and lead their schools by example.

- Give charter schools their fair share of funding, for facilities as well as operations, so they can provide instruction that is culturally appropriate for their communities. Charter schools have demonstrated that they can produce successful, self-confident students, even in the face of tremendous obstacles created by the Department of Education. Such schools are especially important for Hawaiian students, who suffer greatly under the current one-size-fits-all system. It is time to give Charter Schools the resources and the support to excel.
- Instead of launching the "weighted student formula" in the 2006-07 school year, start this sensible funding plan a year earlier. Under this formula, money would be allocated based on the needs of individual students, rather than on enrollment totals at schools. Implementing the weighted student formula is not rocket science. There are successful models we can use from school systems elsewhere. Let us get on with the task now.

- Make the school community councils advisory in nature. That way, councils can offer their recommendations to principals without complicating the decision-making process or confusing who the public should hold accountable.

It's important to note that I did not mention local school boards among my proposed changes. That does not mean I have abandoned this critical concept, for I have not.

I want to assure our residents – especially those on the neighbor islands – that I will do everything possible to give the people an opportunity to vote on the issue of nonpartisan, locally elected school boards in the 2006 general election.

Education reform is not about the legislature and governor, or Republicans and Democrats. It's about the children, and it's about the future of our state. The people of Hawaii realize this and that's why they want to see significant progress this session. If the legislature makes the five changes I recommend, we will have a much better bill that will really advance the cause of student achievement through education reform.

My administration and our supporters took on a tremendous challenge by confronting the education establishment and publicly highlighting its failures. These supporters include Republicans in the House and Senate, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Maui Chamber of Commerce, the Hawai'i County Council, the IMUA school advocacy organization, the Kaua'i Filipino Chamber of Commerce, the Hawai'i Kai and Kalani Iki-Kuliou'ou Neighborhood Boards, the Maui News and the Organization of Chinese Americans Hawai'i Chapter.

We did not accomplish nearly what we had hoped, but together we succeeded in making education reform the most prominent public policy issue in our state. And now, together, the legislature and I have one last opportunity before the session ends to do what the people brought us here to do.

To let the education bill in its current form become law as is would mean we have squandered a chance to act in a bipartisan way to achieve real reform. And far worse, we would have deprived our children of the quality education they deserve.

I am not asking for these changes on my behalf. I am asking on behalf of people all across our state who have watched the many previous attempts to fix our schools and who don't want to settle for less this time than real education reform.

The bill, with the five requested changes, would set events in motion. It would help teachers, principals, and the community to overcome the paralyzing inertia that has gripped our education system for so long. It would "keep the ball in play," so to speak. While far from perfect, and not at all what I expected when the session started, this modified legislation would move us ahead.

Someone once asked Thomas Edison if he got discouraged when an invention did not turn out as planned. "I am not discouraged," he said, "because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward." Let's discard what is wrong with this bill and pass a law that truly moves us forward.

Before concluding my comments, I would like to repeat a challenge I made to the legislature three months ago in my State of the State Address. I called on Hawai'i's leaders to be more than politicians

who act out of self-interest and the interests of their respective parties. I called on us to be good statesmen who truly care about the people.

There was certainly much activity at the State Capitol over these past three months, but did we rise to the level of statesmen? The answer, I'm sorry to say, is "no." However, this session is not over just yet, and there is still time to achieve a bipartisan agreement that will improve our school system and ultimately do what's best for our children.

Students represent the future of Hawai'i, and their needs should be foremost in our minds. Let's work together to give our children a brighter future. Instead of remaining politicians, let's become statesmen.

Time seems short, but we still have one last opportunity to make real progress. A week is an eternity in our world. Let's seize this historic opportunity and pass the **"Bipartisan Education Reform Act of 2004."**

Mahalo.